

In-Class Essay Reminders: Open Question

Approaching the Essay:

1. Read & annotate the question: what are you being asked to do? What components need to be addressed?
2. Plan your answer to the question:
 - a. What work do you intend to use? (unless you've been given one specifically)
 - b. What will you write about in each body paragraph?
 - c. What is your conclusion about the work and the question?
3. Write!!!

Organization:

- Get to the point in your introduction. Don't muddle your ideas with fluff (3-4 sentences)
- Do not wait until the conclusion to pull the curtain back. Be explicit with your universal message in the thesis statement.
- Do not merely repeat the same idea over and over. Come back to the universal idea in each paragraph.
- Consider an organizational method other than the traditional five paragraph essay format.
- Use topic sentences efficiently to move the argument forward, not to summarize the plot.
- You must have a conclusion, even if it's only one sentence.

Holistic Interpretation:

- Consider the **WHOLE** novel to show **MASTERY** of the text
 - How could one manage this when focusing on a minor character? *Suggestions?*
- Move through the text. This will help you accomplish a holistic interpretation.
- Be original. We discuss a book over the course of 3-4 days. Take a different approach.
TIP: Take a new angle and bring new examples to the table; take a risk and pick a unique character; OR step up your writing style

Meaning of Work:

- Whether it says "significance of work" or "meaning of work" or nothing, you must address the universal message of the work (this is part of ATQ)
- Think about the author's intent; you have to find the "so what?"
- A **universal message** is something that applies to all humans. "Mariam's realization that she can love and be loved in return" is still dealing with characterization and NOT universal, regardless of implicitness.
- Go beyond prompt. If the prompt asks about the success of the character's search for justice, you need to say more than "the novel reveals how justice is necessary to be successful in life."
- Don't expound on the greatness of the author or work. "Amy Tan's phenomenal novel..." or "Hosseini effectively..." ugh!

Complexity and Specificity:

- Being specific doesn't mean explaining **ONE example** for an entire paragraph
- Clarify precise moments of the text - avoid generalities (**summary is death**)
- If you quote, pick ones which are **quote-worthy**
- Avoid relying on **vague terminology** throughout the essay (society, thoughts, values, experiences)—**doesn't show mastery of text!**
- Have an arsenal of appropriate vocabulary and analytical wording, but make certain that the words fit. Ironically, some essays wind up scoring in the lower half because they are pretentious, lack clarity, and sometimes say nothing of relevance to the prompt.
- Go beyond plot/characters
- Don't make general statements like "throughout the history of mankind" or "all people at some point." This often signals your inability to respond in a thoughtful manner.

Extras That Make Me Happy

- Write as legibly and neatly as possible in blue or black ink. Readers will stop reading if too sloppy.
- Write in the literary present tense.
- Choose action verbs rather than forms of being; avoid passive voice! (The birth of Mariam vs. Mariam's birth)
- Strut your stuff and find your voice! You can do this!